2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
OI20 Tiwi OI20

CHAPTER VII

The Astronomy of the Tiwi

171 The Tiwi's knowledge of the night sky does not appear to be as extensive as
773 that of the aborigines of the adjoining Arnhem Land (Mountford, 1956, Part 6).

821 Although myths relating to the sun, the moon, the Milky Way, the stars and Orion and the Pleiades were often told, I was unable to find any relating to the Southern Cross, Scorpio, the Magellan Clouds and other constellations well-known to the aborigines of Arnhem Land.

The Universe

821 The Tiwi believe that the earth is flat, and so limited in area that, if they travel far from the shores of their tribal country, they would fall over the edge. As evidence of this they point out that, in the morning they can see *Wuriupranala*, the sun-woman, rise above the eastern rim and, at the end of the day, disappear beneath the western rim of the world.

The earth, too, is of limited thickness, the aborigines believing that, if they dug a hole sufficiently deep they would reach the lower world, *Ilara*.[56]

772 The aboriginal universe of the Tiwi consists of four levels, (*a*) a subterranean world, Ilara, (*b*) the earth on which the aborigines live, (*c*), the sky-land, Juwuku, and (*d*) an upper world, Tuniruna.

772 On Ilara where it is always dark, there are two high stony ranges with a
776 valley between. It is along this valley that the sun-woman, *Wuriupranala*,
821 and according to some informants, the moon-man, *Tjapata*, guided only by the light of their glowing torch of bark, travel each day from the western horizon to their homes in the east. As there are no plants or animals on Ilara, the celestial travellers cannot gather any food during their underground journey, although they can quench their thirst at a stream which flows from the top of one of the high mountains.

During the wet season, *Pakadringa*, the man of the thunderstorms; *Tomituka*, the woman of the monsoon rains; *Bumerali*, the lightning woman, with her husband and her many children, make their home on the sky-land,

[171] [56] I did not find a belief among the Melville Islanders, like that of the aborigines of Groote Eylandt, that the earth was a thin crust resting on the top of the water. (Mountford, 1956, p. 67.)

2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
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Juwuku; while the sun-woman, the men of the Milky Way, the star women and the moon-man (except for a short period each month) travel daily across its surface. 772 776 821

Above the sky is another world, Tuniruna. This is the day-time home of numberless star women, the *Tapalinga*, and the men of the Milky Way, the *Maludaiaini*. During the dry season, *Pakadringa*, *Tomituka* and *Bumerali*, with her family leave the sky-world, Juwuku, and make their homes in Tuniruna.

Unlike the Ilara, the lowest world, Tuniruna resembles the earth except that there is no sea, although there are many freshwater streams and swamps. All the creatures and plants that live on Melville Island, with the exception of the saltwater fish, are also at Tuniruna.

Every morning the inhabitants of the upper world leave their camps, the women to gather the plant foods of the forest, the men to hunt and capture the creatures, such as freshwater fish and the geese, ducks, pelicans and jabirus, that live in the extensive swamps. Also, many fruits grow at Tuniruna, some of which were specifically named, i.e., *rakarina*, the wild plum; *saurarinia*, the white-fruited eugenia; *kinamia*, the red-fruited eugenia; *putatabuna*, a small egg-shaped fruit about three-eighths of an inch long; *kwerka*, cycad fruit, and the various yams.

By the time the sun-woman has sunk below the western horizon and extinguished her torch, the inhabitants of Tuniruna, the upper world, have returned from their foodgathering and are lighting their camp-fires to cook the food they have brought in. The light from these fires illuminates the upper world as brightly during the night-time as the sun-woman, with her blazing torch, illuminates the earth during the day-time.

About November, *Pakadringa*, *Tomituka* and *Bumerali* leave Tuniruna and travel from place to place in the sky-world, shedding rain on the parched earth. During this time, the aborigines claim that those with good hearing can distinguish a low "Sh . . . sh . . .", the pleasure call of the thirsty trees as their roots drink the moisture from the sodden ground. It is then that the trees and plants of the upper world, using the raindrops as a vehicle, send their spirits (analogous to the human *Pitipituis*) (p. 146), to the ground beneath, where they grow into plants similar to their progenitors in the upper world.[89] That is, all the plants and trees in the land of the Tiwi were once, as tiny spirits, dropped from the upper world, Tuniruna. 776 821 [824]

[89] I did not specifically inquire whether the creatures in the upper world also sent down their spirits in the same manner as the plants. However, as both plants and human beings have a spirit origin, it is reasonable to assume that the creatures originate in a similar manner. Further research on this subject will be of considerable interest. [124]

2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
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824 This belief probably accounts for the fact that I did not hear any songs chanted, or witness any ceremonies (with the possible exception of the *kulama*) that would bring about a plentiful supply of food. Nor did I hear [171] of any increase centres such as I saw on Groote Eylandt, (Mountford, 1956, pp. 84, 91), and were seen by Spencer and Gillen (1899, p. 166), and myself (1948, p. 145) in Central Australia.

The Sky and the Upper World

532 821 772 Pl. 63D is a bark painting of the sky and the upper world, Tuniruna. The central series of concentric circles represent an unidentified planet, one of the wives of *Tjapara*, the moon-man; the designs, *d*, *d*, *d*, *d*, are some of the stars, *Tapalinga*; *f*, *f*, are the plum trees (already mentioned), which grow in the upper world. The radiating lines are the limbs of the plum trees.

The inner square, *b*, is the upper world, Tuniruna, the chevron patterns are the clouds in the sky, and the outer square the surface of the earth.

The groups of dots, throughout the painting, are the spirit fruits of the many trees at Tuniruna, which (as mentioned earlier), fall from the upper world to the earth beneath.

The Sun-woman, Wuriupranala

773 776 A myth, belonging to the early creation period, tells of how *Wuriupranala*, one of the first women, was given the task of keeping alight a torch of blazing bark. When, after the *pukamuni* of *Purukupali*, the men and women changed themselves into creatures and plants, *Wuriupranala* became the sun-woman, who travels daily across the sky, her torch of blazing bark providing the world with light and heat.

776 821 However, before *Wuriupranala* sets out from the eastern horizon, she powders her body with red ochre, the dust of which flying into the air, reddens the clouds of early morning.

When she reaches the western horizon, *Wuriupranala* again powders her body (this accounts for the brilliant sunsets), extinguishes her torch and rests for a while beside a celestial lagoon, Kumpinulu, before returning to the east along a path through the subterranean world, Ilara. On this journey, she is guided only by the light from the glowing end of her smouldering torch.[68]

532 773 776 Three bark paintings, Pl. 60A, B, Pl. 61A, B, and Pl. 63A, B, deal with the myth of the sun-woman.

The designs on one side of a *pukamuni* basket, Pl. 61A, B, picture the sun, moon and stars.

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[68] See pp. 35, 40 for more details of the sun-woman.